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An Early Estimate of Walt. Whitman by Ferdinand Freiligrath.

From the *Allgemeine Zeitung* (Augsburg), May 10, 1868.

WALT. Whitman! Who is Walt. Whitman? The answer is: A poet! A new American poet! His admirers say the first, the *only* poet America has hitherto produced. The only specifically American poet. No follower in the beaten paths of the European muse, but coming fresh from the prairies and Western settlements, fresh from the coast and the great rivers, fresh from the crowded seaports and cities, fresh from the battle-fields of the South, the odor of the soil which created him still clinging to his dress, hair and beard. One whose like has never yet been; one who stands firm and self-conscious on American feet, a prophet of great and strange things to come. His admirers go still further: Walt. Whitman is in fact the only poet in whom the restless, searching age has found its expression, the poet *par excellence*, the poet.

Thus on one side his admirers, among whom we meet even an Emerson; on the other, the fault-finders and abusers; beside boundless praise and enthusiastic recognition, the bitterest sarcasm and merciless invective.

To all this the poet remains indifferent. He accepts the praise as his due and meets his adversaries with contempt. He believes in himself; his self-reliance is unlimited. "He is," says his English publisher, W. M. Rossetti, "above all else the *one* man who has earnest convictions and confesses that now as in the future, he will be the founder of a new poetical literature, a great literature suitable to the material grandeur and incalculable destinies of America." He believes that the future will consider him as much the maker of America as it will Columbus as the discoverer of the Western continent, or Washington as the founder of the States. A sublime conviction, indeed, expressed more than once by the poet in magnificent words, none more splendid than those beginning the poem:

Come, I will make the continent indissoluble,
I will make the most splendid race the sun ever shone upon,
I will make divine, magnetic lands,
With the love of comrades,
With the lifelong love of comrades.

This has a proud ring. Has the man also the right to utter such things? Let us become more intimate with him and consider his life and work. Let us open his book!

Are these verses? The lines are printed like verses, to be sure, but verses they are not. No metre, no rhyme, no strophies, but rhythmical prose—the versification of the Psalms. At the first glance rough, unpliant, formless, and yet

not devoid of harmony for a sensitive ear. The language simple, solid, straightforward, giving everything its right name, fearing nothing, sometimes obscure. The strain rhapsodical, prophetic, and often unequal, blending the sublime and commonplace sometimes to a degree that verges on tastelessness. In spite of every other dissimilarity, he reminds us sometimes of our Hamann, or of Carlyle's oracular wisdom, or of the "Paroles d'un Croyant." But out of all breathes the Bible—its language, not its faith.

And what does the poet give us in this form? Above all, himself, his *ego*—Walt. Whitman; this ego, however, is a part of America, a part of the earth, of humanity, of the universe. With this conviction and linking the sublimest to the most insignificant objects, he rolls out a huge panorama before us, always taking America as his starting and closing point (for the future belongs to a free people). A cosmopolitan spirit, so to say, pervades Walt. Whitman and his Americanism, such as is peculiar to contemplative natures, who, alone with infinity, spend lonely days on the seacoast or lonely nights under the starlit skies of the prairies. He finds himself in everything and everything in himself. He, the single man, Walt. Whitman, is humanity and the world. And the world and humanity are one grand poem to him. Everything he sees or hears or comes in contact with, even the meanest, the most insignificant, the most commonplace, everything appears to him as the symbol of something higher, something more spiritual. Or, rather, materia and the spirit, reality and the ideal are one and the same to him. Thus, self-made, he appears to us loafing at his ease, singing his songs, a proud, free man and *only* a man, opening to us world-wide social and political vistas.

A wonderful apparition, in truth! We acknowledge that it impresses, alarms and strangely fascinates us. And yet we find that we are not yet finished with our judgment, that we are still influenced by our first impressions. In the meantime we are probably the first in Germany to form an opinion of the existence and activity of this fresh power. The queer fellow deserves to be considered closer by our poets and thinkers, threatening, as he does, to overthrow all our *ars poetica*, our esthetic capons and theories. And true it is, that after having read in these solemn pages, after having listened to the deep, sonorous roar of Walt. Whitman's muse, rushing on our ear like the continuous beating of the ocean's waves, our traditional versification, our endeavor to force our thoughts into certain traditional forms, our jangling of verses, our counting and measuring of syllables, our making of sonnets, strophes and stanza appear almost childish to us. Have we really arrived at that point when life demands new modes of expression even in poetry? Has this age so many and such important things to tell us, that the old vessels are insufficient for the new contents? Are we standing before a poetry of the future, as already for years a music of the future has been predicted to us? And is Walt. Whitman greater than Richard Wagner?

"Our strength grows out of our weakness. Not until we are pricked and stung and sorely shot at, awakens the indignation which arms itself with secret forces."

"The wise man always throws himself on the side of his assailants. It is more his interest than it is theirs to find his weak points."—FROM R. W. EMERSON'S "COMPENSATION."

THE ECHO.

THE most famous echo in the world is that of the Lorelei on the Rhine, known to all tourists. I believe, it repeats seven times. To-day, however, I do not want to speak of these quaint phenomena of nature, but of the most conspicuous echo in our American art life: Arthur B. Davies.

It is about 10 years ago that he and several other aspirants to fame painted in Chicago a copy of Munkacsy's "Christ before Pilate" from some reproduction, coloring it according to their own imagination and exhibiting it as the original. At that time Mr. Davies had not yet the audacity to put his own name to it. Now, I believe, he would not even shrink from that.

I know Mr. A. B. Davies for some time. I was even one of the very first who attracted attention to him. I then believed that he had *original* talent, which I now decidedly doubt. I have watched him too closely; and being—rather disagreeable I suppose for him—just as well acquainted with decadent literature as he, and having a knowledge of contemporary art publications as perfect as his, I am in the position to trace the origin of all his work.

Well, the Echo had another exhibition at Macbeth, April 24th to May 8th, and revealed once more his marvelous capacity of appropriating other men's work. One had to quote the names of all artists, old and new, of all ages and climes, to do justice to his phenomenal reflective art.

His pictures are merely patchwork of other men's ideas and technical characteristics. For instance, a Pre-Raphaelite figure under a Ruysdael tree with an Inness light effect and a Steinen background, representing a Walter Pater idea. Or some German philosopher's thought depicted by a Botticelli figure, painted in the Manet style with a Rydersky. Or an Abbott Thayer subject, one-half painted in Sargent's manner with Ruskin embellishments and the other half in Monticelli impasto with Japanese reminiscences. Or a Holbein-Beardsley nude meeting a lopsided Steinen child. Or a hash of Moreland, Michel and Carrière. Or a pudding of Watts, Leighton and Titian, or anything else you like. At times he even imitates his imitators, Rosenberg and Hamilton, Williams, etc.

Do you remember how well his 1896 exhibit reflected his European journey? I could tell from it his whole route and every picture gallery he had visited.

In the whole history of art I do not know of another man who is such an expert plagiarist as Mr. A. B. Davies. That's something. It is at present his individuality.

W. Macbeth, who is the art critic of his own gallery and exhibitions, involuntarily made a very true statement in his "introduction," of the Davies catalogue, namely: "that it would be an impossibility for an artist of Mr. Davies' temperament to stand still." Mr. Davies is always on the go, always in search of something, rummag-

ing through some private library, or perusing vagrom magazines in some garret.

Nothing and nobody is safe from him. Nothing and nobody is sacred to him.

The Echo will probably remember that I once upon a time showed him several outline pencil-drawings made by a young girl of Atlantic Highlands. They were exquisite in feeling and remarkable in many ways for an unprofessional, and he liked them so well that he asked me to give him one. I did so. To my great surprise I found an exact copy of this outline drawing used in one of his pictures that he exhibited at Macbeth a little over a year ago.

Another time I told him that Mr. Theodore Robinson had some reproductions of Degas' drawings at his studio. Mr. Davies went to see them, and only a few weeks elapsed before a heap of sketches depicting circus life, all done in the Degas style, with its peculiar grouping and mannerism of showing merely a part of figures instead of complete ones, were produced by the never tiring Echo.

I have seen the Echo look at Salon catalogues, publications like those of the Secessionists at the Berlin Photograph Co.; get impressed by one or the other picture, and transform the suggestion at once into an A. B. Davies.

He has told me stories as his own experiences which I afterwards found out were told to him by others.

Most amusing to me was the incident of his liking one of my sketches. I am merely an amateur and claim nothing whatever for that pastime of mine, but I have at times queer ideas, and he pretended to like them. It was a girl in a mystic attitude smelling a long-stalked flower, entitled the "Flower Smeller." The next time I came to his studio, I had the pleasure to see his version of the "Flower Smeller." It was a man instead of my damsel of the *Décadence*.

Nothing is original with him; even his few attempts in wood-engraving were weak imitations of Marcel Paris' vigorous style.

If you do not believe that my criticism is just, get several volumes of Salon and Academy catalogues, "The Studio," "Kunst für Alle," and "Gil Blas," and you will soon find out of what stuff Mr. Davies' art is made. Add to it an affectation of *naïveté*, reminiscences from contemporary literature and a certain trickery of technique which feels at home in all styles, and you have solved the true significance of the Echo.

The sooner the profession realizes this the better for our art, as he has already imitators.

Perhaps he will wake up to the fact himself, rouse himself and flee to the wilderness, try to forget, and produce something original. I fear, however, that is already too late. It would take the stomach of an ostrich to digest well all that he has swallowed. The Echo is in the way of moderate financial success, worshipped by certain women who are unacquainted with contemporary art publications, and Brooklyn art patrons who do not even know the difference between a copy or a genuine Rembrandt. A. B. Davies' pictures remind of what those people have already seen and are acquainted with. They can understand his mind's Icarian flights. That is the cause of his mild success with Macbeth and the